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CIA official tells lethal contra aid Congress hears of 1986 airdrops

WASHINGTON (AP)—A high-ranking member of the CIA acknowledged to Congress he was aware that lethal supplies were being air-dropped to Nicaraguan contras with U.S. assistance, according to declassified testimony released Tuesday.

Alan Fiers, chief of the Central Intelligence Agency's Central American task force, said he provided direction for U.S. assistance in lethal materiel drops to the contras fighting on Nicaragua's southern front in 1986.

Fiers said he tried to remain within the strictures of the congressional ban on U.S. military aid, and he said the changing language of the Boland Amendment bans caused him to pull back CIA involvement in the airdrops in the spring of 1986.

"By my own admission, if I got some place that is controversial, it was in February and March where I let the reins out, I got a little too rambunctious, like a colt that got out of the barn to play, and I pulled myself back in," he said.

"I didn't do it all myself. My task force lawyer was whispering like Jiminy Cricket in my ear. I probably got us a little too far forward leaning at a point in time and then pulled us back."

A transcript of his testimony was released by the joint congressional Iran-contra investigating committees, which questioned Fiers and two other CIA officers in secret sessions in early August. Fiers was not identified by name in the transcript, but committee

sources confirmed his identity.

Documents released at the same time show that congressional investigators found no evidence of drug trafficking by the contras. That conclusion was revealed in a memo following a review of the contras' financial records, income tax returns and other documents.

On other points, Fiers described his close working relationship with Lt. Col. Oliver North, who he said was "the key figure" in the administration on Central American policy because of a void left by internal feuds at the State Department and the National Security Council.

"There is very little ... that happened in Central America that I didn't talk to Ollie about," he told the committees. But he said he knew that the law prevented him, in late 1984 and 1985, from passing intelligence information to the contras.

He said North assured him everything he was doing was legal.

Fiers also said the task force managed the CIA's operations in Central America and reported directly to then-CIA director William Casey and his deputy.

Fiers defended his receipt of a \$20,000 CIA bonus for his performance in 1986. "That was not done by the director [Casey] as a bribe," Fiers testified. "... For three months I didn't cash that check. I kept it in my drawer, because I said I've got to wait until I get through this process to see if I really did it or not ... made the right decisions."